DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 311 350 CG 021 965

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TITLE Use of a Diagnostic and Prescriptive Interview in the Colleges of Agriculture and Life Science: A Collaborative Study. Research Report #12-89.
INSTITUTION Maryland Univ., College Park. Counseling Center.
PUB DATE 89
NOTE 11p.; Prepared by the Counseling Center Retention Study Group.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Academic Achievement; *Academic Persistence; Agricultural Education; Biological Sciences; *Black Students; *College Students; Higher Education; *Interviews

ABSTRACT

Black college students (N=55) enrolled in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences (AGLS) at the University of Maryland in the spring semester of 1987 participated in individual interviews with their college's advisors. The interviews were diagnostic and prescriptive in nature, designed to help students identify problems getting in the way of their college experience and locate campus resources to help students further their academic development. The interviews also involved a discussion of the "noncognitive variables" articulated by Tracey and Sedlacek (1984) as factors influencing black student retention in higher education. Students who participated in the interview did not differ significantly from those who no-showed for their interview or from a non-treatment comparison group drawn from black AGLS majors in 1985, on their rates either of academic retention or of academic retention in good standing. Indeed, the comparison group had slightly lower academic persistence rates and slightly higher rates of persistence in good standing than the treatment group, which suggests that while the attention devoted to students in the present study may have increased the sample's likelihood of persistence, efforts aimed at increasing academic competence may well be in order. (Author)

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Use of a Diagnostic and Prescriptive Interview in the Colleges of Agriculture and Life Science: A Collaborative Study

Research Report #12-89

The Counseling Center Retention Study Group*

Vivian Boyd, Steven Carstens, Patricia Hunt, Stanley Hunt, Jean McDevitt, Thomas Magoon

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Use of a Diagnostic and Prescriptive Interview in the Colleges of Agriculture and Life Science: A Collaborative Study

The Counseling Center Retention Study Group
The University of Maryland College Park

Research Report #12-89

Summary

Fifty-five black students enrolled in the Colleges of Agriculture and Life Science (AGLS) in the spring semester of 1987 participated in individual interviews with their College's advisors. The interviews were diagnostic and prescriptive in nature, designed to help students identify problems getting in the way of their college experience and locate campus resources to help students further their academic development. The inteviews also involved a discussion of the "noncognitive variables" articulated by Tracey and Sedlacek (1984) as factors influencing black student retention in higher education.

Students who participated in the interview did not differ significantly from those who no-showed for their interview or from a non-treatment comparison group drawn from black AGLS majors in 1985, on their rates either of academic retention or of academic retention in good standing. Indeed, the comparison group had slightly lower academic persistence rates and slightly higher rates of persistence in good standing than the treatment group which suggests that while the attention devoted to students in the present study may have increased the sample's likelihood of persistence, efforts aimed at increasing academic competence may well be in order.

Use of a Diagnostic and Prescriptive Interview in the Colleges of Agriculture and Life Science: A Collaborative Study

The Counseling Center Retention Study Group*

In the spring semester of 1987, the Assistant Dean of the Colleges of Agriculture and Life Science (AGLS), in response to an inquiry from the UMCP Chancellor's Office concerning retention programs for black students enrolled in those departments, asked for collaboration with the Counseling Center Retention Study Group on a diagnostic and prescriptive interview for their 75 black freshman and sophomore level majors. The Assistant Dean liked the individual mode and shortness of execution time of the diagnostic and prescriptive interview, as well as its behavioral focus (see Retention Study Group, 1986, 1987a, 1987b).

METHOD

The Retention Study Group agreed to train the four graduate advisors from AGLS who would be doing the interviews, and to follow their students for four semesters subsequent to the semester of intervention in order to evaluate the impact of the interview on subsequent retention. The training involved the use of the problem checklist and Resource Manual as instruments for locating campus resources to help students further their academic development. It also

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involved a discussion of the "noncognitive variables" articulated by Tracey and Sedlacek (1984) as factors influencing black student retention in higher education.

The 75 black students were categorized in one of two groups according to their cumulative grade point average: 2.5 and above, or below 2.5. In March 1987 the students in each group received a letter from the assistant dean informing them that they should call for a required appointment which, for those with a less than 2.5 grade point average (GPA), would help them evaluate their academic situation; and for those whose GPA was 2.5 and above, their college experience. During the appointment the student and interviewer would determine what positive course of action the student could take to enhance their college experience.

The individual interviews, conducted by the Assistant Dean or by one of three black graduate students in the divisions of Agriculture or Life Sciences, had two focuses. First, there was a discussion of issues involved in being an ethnic minority student on a large, predominantly white campus. Second, with the aid of a problem checklist and Resource Manual, the interview was designed to help students become acquainted with the variety of campus programs and resources for helping students further their academic development. At the end of the interview, each student completed an Academic Development Plan, in which the student listed the action(s) that the student planned to take in the two weeks following the interview. The student kept a copy and the Dean's office kept a copy.

In order to examine the effects of the intervention on subsequent reenrollment, a nontreatment comparison group was identified, comprised of all black freshmen and sophomores who had declared majors in the colleges of Agriculture or Life Sciences in the spring of 1985 (n=104).

Outcome Variables

There were two outcome variables studied to determine the effect of the intervention on subjects' retention rates:

(1) academic persistence, defined as being enrolled for a given semester;

(2) persistence in good standing, defined as being enrolled for a given semester with no academic action taken as a result of that semester.

These two outcome variables were analysed for four semesters subsequent to the semester of intervention. All data concerning registration status and academic action were obtained from University records.

RESULTS

Of the 75 students contacted for this intervention, 63% were female, 38% were male. Fifty-five showed up for their interview, of which 76% were female and 24% were male. These students constituted the treatment group. Twenty students did not show up for their interview (35% female, 65% male). These students constituted a no-show comparison group.

There were no statistically significant (at the .05 level) differences among the three groups on SAT Verbal or SAT Math scores, as can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1.

Average SAT-V and SAT-M Scores by Group

	GROUP		
	Treatment	No-show	Comparison
SAT-V	427	408	430
SAT-M	450	458	461

Table 2 shows academic persistence rates for the three groups.

Table 2.

Academic Persistence Rates by Group

	GROUP						
	Treatment		No Shows		Comparison		p
Semester	n	%	n	%	n	%	
initial n	55		20		104		
first	51	93	16	80	93	89	n.s.
second	42	76	11	55	70	67	n.s.
third	41	74	10	50	63	61	.088
fourth	33	60	10	50	57	55	n.s.

For the four semesters studied, there was a distinct although not statistically significant tendency for students who participated in a diagnostic and prescriptive interview to have a higher academic persistence rate than those students who did not show for their interview, or those in the comparison group, using the chi square statistic.

Table 3 shows rates of academic persistence in good standing for the three groups.

Table 3.

Academic Persistence in Good Standing by Group

	GROUP						
	Treatment		No Shows		Comparison		p
Semester	n	%	n	%	n	%	
first	27	49	9	45	60	58	n.s.
second	26	47	9	45	52	50	n.s.
third	29	53	8	40	53	51	n.s.
fourth	25	46	7	35	52	50	n.s.

There were no statistically significant differences among the groups on rates of persistence in good standing for any semesters. Indeed, there is a trend for the 1985 comparison group to have nonsignificantly higher rates than the treatment and no-show groups on this variable.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study were disappointing. Apparently, requiring freshmen and sophomores majoring in Agriculture or Life Sciences to participate in a personalized diagnostic and prescriptive interview did not have enough impact statistically to affect retention or retention in good standing. However, there was a trend for those who actually participated in the interview to retain at a higher rate than those who did not participate, or than a 1985 comparison group, which may have an important institutional meaning given the decrease in black student college registration since 1985.

In each of the four semesters analyzed, the students who

participated in the diagnostic and prescriptive interview persisted in good standing at somewhat higher rates than did the students who did not show for their interview. However, the fact that the rates of persistence in good standing are higher for the 1985 comparison group than for the treatment or no-show groups is disturbing. Perhaps changes over time in student registration patterns have affected the College's black population in ways which require more study and more vigorous interventions. While the attention devoted to students in the current study may have increased the sample's likelihood of retention, efforts aimed at increasing academic competence may well be in order.

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